



United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
El Centro Field Office
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IN REPLY REFER TO:
6800; 8560 (P)
NOPA CA-670-07-06
CA-670 23

NOTICE OF PROPOSED ACTION

NOPA CA-670-07-06

State: California
District: California Desert
County: Imperial
Area: Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
El Centro Field Office (ECFO)
1661 S. 4th St.
El Centro, CA 92243

Wilderness Area: Indian Pass

Background

In accordance with Title 43 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1610 5-3, the proposed action and alternatives are in conformance with the following approved land use plan: California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan (1980), as amended In the Northern and Eastern Colorado Desert (NECO) Coordinated Management Plan amendment to the CDCA Plan (2002), an overall goal is "to ensure the long term viability of the Sonoran Desert Bighorn Sheep Metapopulation", with an objective to "maintain, improve, and restore habitat quality within essential habitat" New water developments, including two in the Indian Pass Wilderness, are considered to be necessary to accomplish this objective

Description of Activity

The proposed action is to construct, operate, and maintain two artificial water sources. The proposed locations of the water developments are those analyzed in the NECO plan amendment (Attachment 2). The purpose and need for construction of these facilities is:

1. To fulfill the statutory requirement of Fish and Game Code Sections 1800-1801 which describe maintaining, in perpetuity, "species of wildlife and their habitat" and Sections 4900-4901 which specifically address bighorn sheep by stating: "it is the policy of the State to encourage the preservation, restoration, utilization, and management of California's bighorn sheep population."
2. To provide two permanent and dependable water sources for bighorn sheep.
3. To alleviate the effects of habitat fragmentation by such things as highways, canals, mining, recreation and past and present military uses, etc.
4. To encourage both the seasonal and year-round use of additional habitat within these mountains currently limited by lack of available water
5. To ensure that the East Chocolate Mountains deme remains viable in both the short- and long-term. This deme used to be the largest within this metapopulation but has steadily declined.
6. To increase the distribution of sheep within the East Chocolate Mountain deme, one of nine demes comprising the Sonoran Bighorn Sheep Metapopulation.
7. To maintain viable deme numbers across the Sonoran Metapopulation area thus creating the greatest probability for its long-term persistence. Minimum viable deme population levels have been determined by CDFG using the best available science and metapopulation theory to be at least 50 adult ewes. This threshold has not been met since 1993

CDFG proposes to construct, operate, and maintain two Desert Wildlife Unlimited (DWU) style water sources (named Sheep Track and Horseshoe Tanks) in the western portion of the Indian Pass Wilderness. Each proposed water development would consist of one or more small concrete dams, pipeline, a buried 10,000 gallon storage tank, and a 2,500 gallon wildlife accessible subterranean drinker. The total area of surface disturbance for each construction site is estimated to be 150' x 300'. Each project site will utilize an additional 100'x100' area for camping, equipment offloading, vehicle turnaround and parking. Approximately 2 miles in a drivable wash/historic way would be utilized for vehicle access to Sheep Track Tank. Access to Horseshoe Tank would be through approximately 4 miles of historic way within Julian Wash. Vehicles will be used to carry equipment and materials to each site.

Unique to the DWU guzzler system are a number of factors that contribute to the efficiency and reduction of required maintenance. The design simplicity, lack of mechanical parts, and the ability to collect and store large amounts of water from small rain events has reduced costly repairs and or replacements experienced by different guzzler designs. The number of inspections, monitoring visits and water hauling is also minimized. Additional attributes include low visual impact, increased availability of water for multiple species use, and desert tortoise compatibility. The 2 guzzlers will be equipped with a ramp of sufficient slope that tortoise and other small animals can climb out. The following are specific components of the proposed action.

1. Site Excavation

A 50' x 15' trench would be excavated and backfill materials would be placed to the side of the trench. The tank and drinker would be placed in the trench below the dam area and the excavated rock and soil would be replaced and smoothed back to the surrounding gradient, with the installation buried as described below.

Each installation site would be excavated for the burial of the fiberglass tank and the drinker. Both would be completely buried, except for a 1.5" diameter screened U-vent pipe on the storage tank, as well as the drinker lip, opening and concrete overflow apron which would be exposed at ground level. The tank would be covered to a depth of two feet while the drinker top would be buried to ground level. All excavated materials would be placed adjacent to the excavation during initial construction. The drinker would be set 10' away at or just slightly below the level of the tank. Excavated rock and soil would be replaced, smoothed and contoured to best reflect the surrounding surface contours.

A total of four (4) small washes (one at Sheep Track and three at Horseshoe) would be partially dammed. A small amount of sand would be taken from each wash for use in mixing cement for dams. At Sheep Track Tank the pipe between the dam and tank would consist of a 6" galvanized steel pipe anchored with rebar and partially exposed. Any exposed pipe surface would be painted to match the existing soil color. At the Horseshoe Tank site, the pipe would be 6" ABS and would be completely buried.

2. Storage Tank and Drinker

Each 10,000 gallon fiberglass storage tank would be a 30' by 8' diameter cylinder. Each drinker is a 2,500 gallon, 16' long by 4' wide by 8' deep fiberglass tank with a ramp. The drinkers would be buried underground, up to 10' from the tank and the two would be connected by a 2" flexible pipe to allow for naturally occurring soil movement such as settling or earthquakes. Only the walk-in drinker opening would be exposed. The concrete overflow apron is at the entrance of the drinker opening and would be the width of the drinker, 4' extending 6 - 8' to the front. The entrance to the drinker would include a ramp with steps so that animals having access to the water can escape easily. Steps would descend into the drinker at 1' intervals and be 2.5' wide. The remaining 0.75' on each side of the steps would be roughed, and allow for small animal ingress and egress. The concrete steps and ramp would be constructed on-site, using Portland cement.

3. Dams

Runoff from seasonal rainfall would be detained behind small dam(s) and flow through pipes into the tank. The exposed intake at the dam would be covered with wire mesh to prevent entry of debris. Water would be gravity fed through pipes to the tank and drinker. After the tank and the drinker are filled, excess runoff would flow out of the drinker or over the dam and be returned to the wash.

Each dam would be constructed of reinforced concrete and faced with native stone collected at the site so as to blend into the surrounding landscape. Each dam would partially block water flow in the wash, and be no more than 3' tall. The Sheep Track dam would be 8' wide and the three dams at Horseshoe Tank would be 20', 12' and 12' respectively. A mobile water tank would be utilized to haul all water for construction purposes and would be towed to the site by vehicle. Concrete would be mixed using a

gasoline engine cement mixer and conveyed to the dam and drinker site by wheelbarrows. Natural forces are expected to fill in the upstream side of the dam with wash materials and replace those removed for construction and for mixing concrete.

4. Construction Equipment, Vehicles, Access

Excavation equipment would consist of a Case 680 rubber-tired backhoe for both sites. A trailer-mounted 1,000 gallon water tank (gravity-fed or with a gasoline-powered pump if necessary) would be used for the initial charging of the drinker. An additional 300 gallons would be used for mixing concrete.

Vehicles would be utilized to carry work tools and materials, tow the water, fiberglass, and drinker tanks on trailers, haul a portable gas-powered cement mixer, and transport staff to the site. Motorized equipment would be shut down when not in use to minimize noise disturbance.

Access to the sites will be along NECO approved routes in the Limited Use Areas where they exist and then on pre-existing "Ways" once inside the wilderness boundary. Once activities have been completed, the tracks will be raked out to prevent further wilderness intrusions.

5. Post Construction Rehabilitation

The project area would be flagged prior to construction activities and flagging would be removed upon project completion. Upon completion of the project, areas disturbed by the project would be returned to as close to a natural state as possible. Disturbed soil surfaces at the construction site would be contoured and raked to match the surrounding terrain. Any rocks removed would be scattered over the disturbed area.

6. Personnel

A total of up to 20 people would be at each work area for a maximum of five days at both sites. All personnel would be briefed daily on site safety. Personnel would camp onsite. All trash created on site would be removed upon completion. Supplies, tools and materials would be stored on site when not in use, and a first-aid/safety area would be established. Personnel sanitation and disposal of items would follow standard Leave No Trace/Wilderness practices, which will be discussed as part of daily safety briefings. Mitigation procedures for desert tortoise will also be included in the daily briefings.

7. Monitoring

CDFG and/or its agents would monitor the new artificial water sources twice annually for water level and quality, and functioning condition. Access would be by vehicle to both sites. Monitoring may consist of pellet transect, general wildlife use, photographic data, and guzzler operation. Monitoring reports would be sent to the CDFG Desert Waters Coordinator, the El Centro BLM Field Office, and California Desert District Office.

8. Repair and Refill

The anticipated lifespan of the tank (when buried underground, protected from UV light) is greater than 50 years. Other components of the system may deteriorate or require repair due to infrequent

environmental events. Refill activities are anticipated when storm events do not provide sufficient water to the system. When the system is full, the water would be expected to last for approximately two and a half years without needing any natural recharge or refill.

BLM will prepare an environmental assessment of the proposed action including possible alternatives to determine if the project will have any significant impacts. The document will be available for public comment for thirty days in addition to the comment period for this notice.

Legal Description

Sheep Track - T 12 S, R. 21 E sec. 28
Horseshoe - T. 12 S, R. 21 E sec. 4

Chronology of Events

1994 – California Desert Protection Act designates Indian Pass Wilderness
1996 – Water development construction is first proposed in Indian Pass Wilderness by CDFG
2002 – NECO plan is completed
2006 – CDFG sends a letter to BLM requesting authorization for construction of water sources

Send any comments on this activity to the address above within thirty days of receipt. Comments or questions concerning this or any other action being reviewed by El Centro Field Office are welcome. Should you have any questions regarding this Notice of Proposed Action, please contact John Johnson, Wilderness Coordinator, at 760-337-4442, e-mail: john_johnson@blm.gov.



Vicki L. Wood
Field Manager

